

THE LoTHIANS: A FORTY YEAR POLITICAL HISTORY

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Introduction

An overall survey of politics in the Lothians over the past forty years is quite a complex task to undertake, because a number of important criteria have to be taken into account before reaching a synthesis. Various factors have to be considered, including successive alterations of electoral boundaries; the number of candidates contesting a seat which can widen or narrow the choice offered to the voter; local and national issues which can change considerably from one election to the next; and turnout figures which can vary greatly from one type of election to another.

My love for Scotland, particularly for the Edinburgh area, and my interest for many years in studying the developments in its political life, lead me to write this paper. My major aim is to give a Continental observer's viewpoint on Scottish contemporary politics. The possibility of having a free and open debate, leading sometimes to great controversy, is a major feature which is shared by all genuine Western democracies. However I would like to apologise in advance to the Scottish reader who knows the situation north of the Tweed better than I do and who may discover deficiencies in my comments. My only pretension is to import an external perspective on the political developments in the Lothians over the past forty years and my task is perhaps made easier by the fact that I do not feel directly involved in Greater Edinburgh politics. I shall begin with a brief reminder chronologically of the major political developments in the Lothians from the two-party years in the 50s and 60s to the multi-party system in the 70s and 80s before analysing the reasons for such development and giving a few guide lines which I hope could be used as a starting point for further research.

The two-party years: 1950 to the mid 1960s

The way representative democracy operates in Britain is often cited as an example to the whole world. It must not be forgotten however that the current "first past the post" voting system which has been used for decades, cannot give a precise image of the electorate's opinion, and favours a two party system of domination. If minority party candidates hope to be returned in a proportional representation framework, this is not the case in the present British system. Therefore a number of electors who support such candidates cannot see their political views being represented as they should be in the various elected bodies. In the case of a two cornered contest between

Conservative and a Labour candidate, the elector who doesn't support one of the two main parties can only either abstain or vote for the candidate who seems not to be as bad as the other; that is to say the elector makes a reject or negative vote. On the other hand, a three cornered fight gives an opportunity for a third political trend to be represented and also enables the disappointed elector to register a protest vote.

From an overall view of the Lothians politics in the 50s and the first half of the 60s, one is struck by the near absence of smaller parties, mainly Liberal and SNP, in the political arena. At the time, these two parties were faced with an almost unworkable organisational structure and huge financial difficulties because of a lack of human and financial resources. This posed constraints on their ability to campaign effectively and win electoral support.

An in-depth survey of the results in the ten Lothian parliamentary constituencies, i.e. seven for the City of Edinburgh and three for the surrounding West, Mid and East Lothian counties, leads one to differentiate between the City and the areas, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1

Votes cast for Conservative + Labour candidates in the Lothians, (% of total votes cast) with a split between the City of Edinburgh and the three surrounding counties – General Elections 1950 – 1964.

Elections	Lothians	City	Counties
1950	90	90.5	88
1951	100	100	100
1955	98.4	97.6	100
1959	96	94	100
1964	91.5	93	88.8

The 1951 election represented the peak of the two-party period. In each of the ten Lothian constituencies, it was only candidates from the Conservative and Labour parties who stood. The situation was similar in the three counties at the 1955 and 1959 elections. In 1950 and 1964, the number and quality of candidates from the smaller parties eroded the domination of the larger parties. For example, the Liberal candidates played quite an important part in 1950, while 1964 showed the beginning of a nationalist upsurge, mainly from Billy Wolfe in West Lothian.

Apart from a handful of Communist candidates who had walk-on parts, only Liberal candidates tried to play a major role in the period. They were involved in all contests except West Lothian in 1950: the best return was for

J A Stodart in Berwick and East Lothian (22.4%) while the eight others lost their deposit. The results were rather disappointing for the Liberals, all the more when J A Stodart who wanted to secure his political career resigned from the Liberal Party to join the Conservatives. Low morale and lack of finance led the Liberals to avoid the 1951 fight and they were unable to support a prospective candidate at the Edinburgh by-elections in 1954 (Edinburgh East) and 1955 (Edinburgh North). The official come-back for the party took place at the Edinburgh South by-election in 1957 when W Douglas-Home gained 23.5% of the votes. This was an improvement but it took place in a by-election context. The financing of a campaign in the ten Lothian constituencies in the 1959 general election was far beyond the finance possibilities of the Liberal Party at the time, and it decided to concentrate on three Edinburgh constituencies where there was support from Liberal-minded electors: Leith, because the candidate A Murray could rely on a strong personal vote; South so that W Douglas-Home could consolidate his 1957 by-election support; and West to chastise J A Stodart who was standing under the Conservative banner. The three Liberal candidates got an average of 13.6% of the votes and saved their deposits. With such a good result the Liberals decided to enter the West Lothian by-election in June 1962 but the 10.8% of the votes cast led them to avoid contesting a constituency in future where they had no deep rooted support.

For the 1964 general election, once again because of lack of finance, the Liberals were only involved in three Edinburgh constituencies: South and West in order to confirm the 1959 results, and Pentlands where the Conservative candidate was a newcomer. The three candidates again got an average of 13.6% of the votes and saved their deposits, which meant they neither had a loss nor a gain compared with five years earlier.

During the 50s the Nationalist candidates were hardly visible: they got between 1 and 2% of the votes in West Lothian and Edinburgh Central in 1950 and 1951. Then they were totally absent from the political scene until the arrival of Billy Wolfe at the 1962 West Lothian by-election where he polled 13.3% of the votes. Support for Wolfe increased to 30.4% of the vote at the following general election in 1964, and resulted in the SNP becoming the only serious challenger to Labour's Tam Dalyell.

Over the fifteen years from 1950 to the mid 60s the ten Lothian MPs were either Conservative or Labour. The Conservatives had four strongholds in Edinburgh (North, Pentlands, South and West) while Labour dominated Central, East and Leith plus Mid and West Lothian. Berwick and East Lothian was a Conservative constituency in the 50s, which seemed to be turning toward Labour because of the growth within the constituency of industry and council houses amongst its working class population. The domination of the two main British parties in the Lothians was indisputable but there were some precursory elements which gave some indication of developments in the years to come.

Although evidence on general elections is available, unfortunately it was very difficult to carry out the same kind of survey on local politics. As John Bochel puts it:

There has not been in the past any comprehensive compilation of local election results in Scotland. If our own experience is typical, scholars or others attempting to find out detailed results from even a few years back would have found the task frustrating. Perhaps surprisingly, no department of the Scottish Office is charged with responsibility for collecting election results...Many local authorities systematically destroy their election records after the lapse of a few years...⁽¹⁾

However I have managed to gather all the electoral results for the City of Edinburgh and I have tried to study the political developments in the Scottish capital before the re-organisation of local government⁽²⁾. Over a period of nearly twenty-five years, from 1949 to 1973, the City was divided into twenty-three electoral wards. During the whole of the 50s the political forces in the Edinburgh arena were Labour and Progressives. The Conservatives at the time seemed to think they existed to govern the country, not to decide if there was a need to increase or decrease the number of streetlights. In the pre-war years as in the post-war ones, the Conservatives were therefore not directly involved in local politics. This attitude adopted by top Conservative officials was due to the fact that within a British context they considered a genuine first class political career did not need to begin with a local councillor's seat. The challenger to Labour was the Progressive Association, a gathering of 'moderate-minded' supporters drawn together by their anti-Labour views. However as the years passed on, the Progressives were more and more looked on as the local subsidiary of the Conservatives. As John P Mackintosh put it clearly: "...Progressive (i.e. Conservative) party"⁽³⁾.

Local political life was rather dull. The participation rate of the electorate was low, with an average turnout of 30-33%, which fell to under 20% in some wards. In addition, several candidates were directly returned at each election because they were unopposed. In wards such as Broughton, Newington, Merchiston, Morningside and Murrayfield, Labour knew they had no chance of getting in. In such conditions they preferred not to challenge the Progressives. An identical situation existed in traditional Labour wards such as Craigmillar, Pilton or Sighthill where the Progressives dared not contest a seat.

The first Liberal councillor was Lady Morton who in 1957 succeeded in gaining her Newington seat from the Progressives but without any challenge from Labour. She sought re-election and was returned in 1960 and 1963. In the early 60s the Liberal Party was deeply involved in a rather small number of wards: they gained a few seats from the Progressives (Newington, Corstorphine, Merchiston) but had bad failures in Labour-oriented wards. It should be noted that the entry of a Liberal candidate resulting in a three-cornered fight increased the turnout to over 60% in Newington (1962), and in

Corstorphine and Merchiston (1964 and 1965). The Liberals had support from a loyal electorate who abstained when there was no Liberal candidate in the contest, but they could not afford to finance a yearly campaign in each of the twenty-three wards. The Liberal upsurge altered the City Council structure. The Progressives lost their absolute majority: they had 38 councillors out of 69 in 1961 and only 33 in 1963 and 1964. Nevertheless they did have the support of the four or five Liberal councillors who were determined to stand in Labour's way.

Therefore, during the 50s and early 60s, Conservatives-Progressives and Labour dominated politics in the Lothians, both in terms of the number of Westminster MPs and local councillors. The Liberals on the other hand concentrated on selective campaigns; if they failed to return an MP, they tried instead to have a handful of local councillors. However, by the mid 60s the hegemony of the two major parties was under challenge.

Towards a multi-party system: 1965 onwards

The second half of the 60s was marked north of the Tweed by the upsurge of the SNP, mainly after Winnie Ewing's victory at the Hamilton by-election in November 1967. This SNP success had an important impact in the Lothians. The Nationalists had entered the local Edinburgh arena in 1966 supporting 22 candidates who gained eight seats from Labour. The following year, out of 23 SNP candidates, nine were returned. It can be argued that the Nationalists revived local politics, widening local issues into national ones, brandishing their motto "Put Scotland First". This event was a major element in the Lothians' political development as well as for the whole of Scotland. The Scottish Conservative officials decided to enter the political fight at local level; Sir Gilmour Menzies put it clearly:

"Conservative interest in local government in Scotland is not a flash in the pan... This is to be good for the ratepayer, good for local government and good for the Party. Labour, Liberal and SNP had not been slow to use local government as a base for a wider political action"⁽⁴⁾

Local political life was to acquire a new dimension because of pressure for decentralisation either through a new regional structure or through a wider devolution of powers. The Conservatives could not therefore stand as mere onlookers of such a change. The great majority of Progressive councillors did accept the takeover bid of the Conservative party on their Association but some of them refused to withdraw, making rather stern warnings.

"The Progressive Party believe the citizens of Edinburgh should have the opportunity of electing councillors who are concerned about the management of Edinburgh rather than promoting a national political image". (Jack Slack, Progressive leader - 1971)⁽⁵⁾.

"The Progressive Party believe that Edinburgh must be governed by local people who will always put Edinburgh first. They are not interested in furthering any political party but are dedicated to directing their energies to the needs of the citizens of Edinburgh". (Catherine Filsell, Progressive Councillor – 1972)⁽⁶⁾

Nevertheless in spite of this opposition the City Council was to become the cradle of a few top Conservative political careers, the best example being Malcolm Rifkind's⁽⁷⁾.

For the first time in 1971 the Labour group of 28 councillors was the largest in the City Council, after they gained back the seats lost to the SNP in 1968. But the Council majority was still held by the 27 Progressives allied to the 9 Conservatives. In 1972 and also in 1973, there was a hung Council, Labour having 33 and then 34 councillors, with the Liberals holding the balance of power. Their very soft, unaggressive attitude enabled the Labour leader Jack Kane to become the first Labour Lord Provost in 1972.

Had Edinburgh become a Labour stronghold? In 1973 the answer was a negative one: when adding the votes cast by the Conservatives (34.6%) and the Progressives (6.9%) on one side, and the Liberals (16.6%) and even the SNP (4%) on the other side, it appeared that the anti-Labour forces were supported by over 60% of the electors who voted. However, internal rivalries prevented these forces from showing a united front to be able to run the City Council. Because of the electoral system Labour, supported by only 37.3% of the electors, were able to rule the City.

National politics in the late 60s and early 70s were punctuated by four general elections: 1966, 1970 and two in 1974. The support for the parties is illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2

Votes cast for Conservative + Labour candidates and other parties' candidates in the Lothians (% of total votes cast)
General Elections 1966-74.

Election	Con + Lab	Others
1966	88.8	11.2
1970	84.6	15.4
1974 Feb	72.4	27.6
1974 Oct	64.5	35.5

If in 1966 Conservative and Labour candidates were still supported by nearly 80% of the electorate, eight years later they were backed by less than

two-thirds of voters, while the impact of smaller parties was multiplied by three over the same period. It can therefore be argued that the two-party years seemed to be over, and were being replaced by a multi-party system. Smaller parties were making huge efforts: if there were only three Liberal and three SNP candidates in the ten Lothians constituencies in 1966, their number would gradually increase to ten each in October 1974. The Lothian electorate, as well as the whole of Scotland, who used to support mainly the two major British parties, was disconcerted and disappointed by a series of topical events. These included the equivocation of Conservatives and Labour over Devolution and the future of Europe; the use of the new North Sea oil resources (underlined as "British" for the "London" parties and purely "Scottish" for the SNP) which in theory could have financed a Scottish economic recovery; and disillusionment with the two main parties' ability to manage the economy. In such conditions many electors shifted to the Liberal and more often to the SNP banner. This shift is illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3

Votes cast for Conservative, Labour, Liberal and SNP candidates in the Lothians (% of total votes cast)
General Elections 1966-74.

Elections	Con.	Lab.	Lib	SNP
1966	39.3	49.5	3.5	7.3
1970	39.7	44.9	4.2	11.0
1974 Feb	35.4	37.0	7.7	19.7
1974 Oct	27.1	37.4	8.5	26.8

From 1966-74 the support for Conservative and Labour candidates fell equally by 12%. The strong increase in the number of Liberal candidates was not reflected in their returns, in contrast to the SNP who made tremendous progress in this period. By late 1974 in the Lothians, Labour was clearly the first party with a ten point lead over both the Conservatives and the SNP who were roughly equal, while the Liberals were far behind. Nevertheless, because of the electoral system, the ten Lothian MPs were still either Conservative or Labour. Therefore, as far as the representation of people in the Commons was concerned, the two party mode was still in evidence.

By the end of 1974, in Conservative strongholds (Edinburgh North, Pentlands, South and West) the SNP breakthrough – 20% to 25% of the votes – was at the expense of both Conservatives and Liberals. In Labour-dominated constituencies (Edinburgh Central, Leith and Midlothian) the SNP, who got between 25% and 35% of the votes, were supported mainly by former Labour voters. In Berwick and East Lothian, the SNP presence favoured a

Conservative victory in the February election (Michael Ancram), while a multi-cornered contest at the next election in October of the same year allowed the former Labour MP, John P Mackintosh, to be returned. In West Lothian the SNP's Billy Wolfe stood as the only serious challenger to Labour's Tam Dalyell. The SNP vote could therefore be considered mainly as a protest vote but in Labour strongholds quite a high number of moderate electors no longer believed in a possible Conservative victory and bet, albeit temporarily, on the SNP.

The Late 70s: the Devolution Years

This period was marked by two major issues, the future of Europe and, above all, Devolution. Conservative and Labour activists and leaders have been strongly divided over these two issues which resulted in confusion in the electors' mind. The Wilson and especially the Callaghan years, with the Lib-Lab pact and the benevolence of the SNP, were the background to a wider debate which did not help in clarifying the situation. The failure of the Devolution referendum in March 1979, contributed to the fall of Callaghan's Labour government. During the general election campaign in May 1979, the SNP and to a lesser extent the Liberals had nothing new to offer and a significant number of electors came back to support the two major British parties. In the Lothians, Labour got 43.3% of the votes and the Conservatives 33.7% while the SNP vote fell to 13% and the Liberals' to under 10%. Therefore, Labour and Conservatives together had 77% of the votes. Was it a return to the two-party system, and if so, had the SNP upsurge and the setting up of a multi-party structure only been a flash in the pan? The early 1980s were to provide an answer to these questions.

The first Thatcher years

In the early 80s it became evident that there was to be no return to the two-party system. The major event was the split within the Labour Party and the creation of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) by a 'moderate' group of top Labour people. Later an electoral agreement signed by the Liberals and the SDP gave birth to the 'Alliance', a left-centrist force. The new Alliance faced their first major electoral contest at the next general election in June 1983 when supporting a candidate in each constituency. In the Lothians, the Conservatives with 30.3% of the votes had a setback of 3% compared to 1979, while Labour got 35.6% of the votes, i.e. 7.7% less than in 1979. The Alliance, with 26.3%, became the third main political force in the Lothians, as well as in the whole of Scotland, while support for the SNP fell to 7.4%. It appears that many moderate electors who no longer trusted the two major parties in 1974 but who went back to support them in 1979, now rejected Thatcherism on one side and Labour's move to the left on the other. Instead they supported the Alliance perhaps in the hope that eventually a strong third force would be a serious challenger to the two traditional main parties.

Four years later, at the June 1987 general election, the situation changed again (see Table 4).

Table 4

**Votes cast for the four main parties in the Lothians (% of total votes cast)
General Elections of June 1983 and June 1987**

Party	1983	1987
Conservative	30.4	27.3
Labour	35.6	41.6
Alliance	26.2	20.5
SNP	7.4	10.2

The Conservatives faced another three point setback and, it can be argued, paid the price for the impact of Thatcherite policies in Scotland, especially the issue of the Poll Tax. The Alliance lost some ground but remained undoubtedly the third force in the Lothians. The dual leadership issue and the Alliance's rather confused platform for instance on defence no doubt contributed to the decline in support. The SNP had made slight progress but the overall winner was Labour who managed to attract back many electors who supported the Alliance in 1983. By the end of the 80s there was what can be described as an unbalanced three-party system with one large party – Labour – two medium-sized formations – Conservative and Alliance – plus the SNP some way behind. However, the ten Lothian MPs were still either Labour or Conservative; although the 6:4 ratio in favour of Labour shifted to 8:2 with the Conservatives losing two Edinburgh seats to Labour (Central and South) mainly due to the setback for the Alliance and the increase in turnout.

The fifteen year period from the mid 70s to the late 80s was marked by the new local government system in home politics and the European question in foreign politics. Local politics were completely changed with the setting up of the new district/region pattern and the related elections for the two-tier councils. At the regional level the development of support for parties was in line with the trend for general elections, i.e. an SNP breakthrough in the mid and late 70s followed by an upsurge of the Alliance in the early 80s; and a slow and steady decline in Conservative support with Labour remaining the leading political force even if they were faced with some difficulties in 1982.

The situation was slightly different at the district level. In Edinburgh the Conservatives were the leading force up to 1984 when they were replaced for the first time by Labour. But the two-party system was still strong in the Capital's district council. The position was similar in East Lothian where Labour had a majority. In West Lothian and to some extent in Midlothian

there was strong competition between Labour and the SNP in the mid and late 70s followed by domination by the Labour Party. This could be attributed to the unpopularity of Conservative policies in Scotland; the split in the Alliance Party; and the revival of support for the SNP. However, it appeared that the presence of the Liberal/Alliance and of the SNP had transformed and widened local issues into national ones. Local elections were now considered a good indicator of the state of mind prevailing in the electorate. Nevertheless Conservatives and Labour still continued to share the great majority of seats in the different elected bodies at national and local level. And in the Lothians, where the electorate was prepared to vote for parties other than Conservative or Labour, representation was still dominated by them.

The 1979-89 decade was also marked by three Euro-elections in 1979, 1984 and 1989. The Lothian Euro-constituency covered nine out of the ten national parliamentary constituencies, with Berwick and East Lothian (formerly East Lothian) being included in the neighbouring Euro-constituency of Scotland South. In general, at Euro-elections anywhere in Europe, the elector gives an opinion not so much on the future of Europe as on current national issues. The Lothians were no exception. In June 1979, a few weeks after the Conservatives came back to power at Westminster, the Conservative candidate Ian Dalziel was returned as the Lothian MEP. But since June 1984, Labour's David Martin has been the representative of Greater Edinburgh in Strasbourg, profiting from a decline in support for the Conservative Party in Scotland. Once again it must be underlined that smaller parties who did quite well at Euro-elections had no MEP. Britain is the only member of the EC which adopted a one-seat-per-Euro-constituency representation system.

Changes in the Lothian electorate

Different reasons can be advanced for the shifts in electoral voting patterns in the Lothians. These relate to the changing attitudes and sociological characteristics of the electorate. The first element to be examined, however, is the turnout at different types of elections, which provides some indication of the motivation and involvement of the public.

At general elections the turnout in the ten Lothian constituencies was roughly identical to the average turnout in Scotland. Over the past thirty-five years it was between 75 and 80%, with the exception of 1983 (71.5%) when all the national opinion polls forecast a clear Conservative victory. The reason for the reduced turnout could perhaps be attributed to this factor which led to a larger number of apathetic voters. At parliamentary by-elections, the turnout was usually far lower because voters were aware that the results would not have a dramatic effect on the way the country was being governed. During the two-party years in the 50s when quite a number of candidates were being returned unopposed; the local election turnout in Edinburgh was very low with an average of 30/33%, falling in some wards down to 18%. In the 60s with the

arrival of Liberal and later SNP candidates and the broadening of the issues, the turnout rose to 45% in 1968. In the 70s and 80s, for district and regional elections, the turnout was between 45 and 50%. Therefore the more candidates to choose from and the widening of the issue involved, provided greater incentive to the electorate. This led some observers to take local elections as a barometer of the political mood of the electorate, but it must not be forgotten that the turnouts were far lower than at a general election.

The devolution referendum turnout in the Lothians was 66.6%, i.e. the Scottish average, but this figure might be seen as rather disappointing when the issue was nothing less than the future of Scotland. At the 1975 referendum on Europe the Lothian turnout was 63.6%, i.e. identical to the Scottish south and central belt regions, while all the northern regions had a turnout below 60%. It appeared that the further from the heart of Europe, the less interested the voter was in European issues.

At Euro-elections in 1979 and 1984 the Lothian turnout was 35%, but it rose to 42% in 1989. The Lothian electorate as well as the Scottish and European electorates voted once again not on European but on domestic issues. In Scotland the focus was on Mrs Thatcher's famous Poll Tax, while a significant percentage of British voters supported the newly established Green movement.

It can be argued that the average voter was perfectly aware of the importance of each type of election. The more important or relevant it was deemed to be, the more he/she turned up to vote. A clear hierarchy can then be deduced:

1. General parliamentary elections: the whole future of the country in the coming four or five years depends on the results, while by-elections are not as important.
2. As more powers were devolved to the new local authorities and wider issues were involved, this resulted in a greater interest being shown by the electorate at regional and to some extent at district elections.
3. Euro-elections seem to be Euro in name only. The elector will abstain quite easily if he/she does not want to protest against domestic policies.
4. Referenda are an exception in British politics and cannot be compared readily to other elections.

Turning to sociological factors, an important element is the possible correlation between voting behaviour and type of housing that is whether it is owner-occupied or council housing. The idea that council house tenants are relatively poor and vote for Labour, while owner-occupiers are wealthier and support the Conservatives or the Liberals, is widely held but not always true. It

is difficult, for example, to explain the success of the SNP at different times in both Conservative and Labour seats. In Labour-dominated suburban constituencies, the majority of electors live in council houses, but the situation was rather different in the City of Edinburgh in the 70s. The constituencies with the highest number of council houses were East and Pentlands; if the former was a Labour stronghold, the latter was Malcolm Rifkind's territory. There was a majority of owner-occupiers in Labour-dominated Leith and Central where a number of lower class, elderly electors had been home owners for decades (although the properties did not always feature modern standard amenities). It is no longer possible to argue today that housing tenure is the main determinant of voting behaviour. A great number of Edinburgh slums disappeared in the 50s and 60s and the growing size and diversity of the middle classes over the past thirty years makes redundant the correlations between owner-occupation and Conservative voting and council house tenancy and Labour voting.

Another interesting element for a continental observer is the impact of religious factors in Edinburgh politics, because although there are several well-known surveys on the correlation between voting and religion, none of them relates directly to the Lothians⁽⁸⁾. Greater Edinburgh may not have attracted attention because it is believed that it was never the site of religious troubles as important as in other major cities in Scotland. Nevertheless the work carried out by the Rev. John Kirk who scrutinised the influence of the Church of Scotland and the Roman Catholic Church in 1971, Edinburgh⁽⁹⁾ showed the significance of religion. When comparing the results of John Kirk's survey with the results of 1970/71 local and general elections, it appears that in the wards with a high number of Church of Scotland members the councillor was usually a Conservative or a Progressive; while in wards with a rather high Catholic population the councillors were normally Labour, while some of them were SNP in 1968. It is known that there was an unofficial pact between the Progressives and John Cormack's Protestant Action Party. For example, John Cormack was never challenged by a Progressive candidate in the 1950s. The Church of Scotland had by far the most members in each of the different social classes; it also represented a key element in Scottish identity, an issue which was dear to the heart of Nationalists. However it seems that religious factors have been less significant in the political arena in Scotland over the past fifteen years with a Protestant returned in a Catholic-dominated area (Glasgow Garscadden); and a Catholic returned in 1983 in the Free Church kingdom of Ross and Cromarty, while the eleven "anti-papal visit" candidates got a total of only 539 votes at the 1982 regional election in the Lothians.

When examining the standard socio-economic criteria in the Lothians, there are no big surprises. The standard of living and the school background of electors in Conservative constituencies was higher than that of electors living in Labour constituencies. Further the unemployment rate was higher in Labour-controlled areas than in Conservative strongholds. However one extra element was interesting. Edinburgh, as a capital city, is rather a cosmopolitan

city, and the importance of the English-born population should be mentioned. In Conservative areas it stood at between 8 and 10% of the population while in Labour constituencies it was only 5%. The great majority of English-born Edinburgh people often settled in the Scottish capital for professional reasons and worked with an English-based company. This fact may also explain partly the reduced popularity of the Nationalists in Edinburgh.

While the outlying areas of Greater Edinburgh have for a long time been dominated by Labour, Edinburgh City over the past twenty years slowly moved towards Labour. The economic depression in the 70s and the policies of the Thatcher years resulted in an electorate no longer prepared to support the Conservatives. The "floating" voter could neither remain loyal to a stable centrist party, nor to a Nationalist party, which some considered to be a multi-sided movement. They seem to have slid slowly towards a Labour Party whose image was gradually becoming less extremist. Yet this transition did not prevent the Conservatives from retaining a very loyal electorate in Edinburgh. If we take as an example Alex Fletcher's and Michael Ancram's cases in 1983 and 1987, they got respectively the same number of votes at both general elections. However a higher turnout and the Alliance setback resulted in them losing their seats to Labour in 1987.

Conclusion

If politics in the Lothians in the 70s and 80s was characterised by a multi-party system, it was also true that as far as elected representatives were concerned, the two-party system dominated by Labour and Conservative still remained very strong, even if from time to time candidates from the other parties were returned in local elections. The Lothians' MPs, MEPs and councillors did not represent clearly the current diversity of the electorate. The major reason for such a situation seemed to be the electoral system. Proportional representation would have given a fairer reflection of the mood of the electorate on polling day but it would probably have resulted in a multitude of smaller parties condemned to negotiate coalition majorities in order to try and govern the nation as well as the regions and the districts. Everyone knows the weaknesses and drawbacks of a coalition, especially in Europe, but this is another debate.

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